

SELFRRIDGE FIELD
(Selfridge Air National Guard Base)
East of Irwin Road, north of N. River Road
Mt. Clemens vicinity
Macomb County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-116

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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SELFRIDGE FIELD
(Selfridge Air National Guard Base)

Historical Overview

I. SELFRIDGE AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE-INTRODUCTION

Selfridge Field, currently known as Selfridge Air National Guard Base is located along the shores of Anchor Bay, Lake St. Clair, in Harrison Township, Macomb County, Michigan. It is located on river lands that were rather thinly settled during the nineteenth century by farmsteads that attempted to survive in the poorly drained soils predominant in the region.¹ Selfridge was named after Lieutenant Thomas E. Selfridge, who promoted aviation as a military tool, was the first military officer to design an aircraft (in cooperation with Alexander Graham Bell and Glenn H. Curtis), the first soldier to pilot a motor-driven aircraft, as well as the first to meet his death in power-flight (in a machine piloted by Orville Wright at Fort Myer, Virginia on September 17, 1908).²

¹Stewart, D.J., Combination Atlas Map of Macomb County, Michigan. D.J. Stewart Company, Philadelphia, 1875; Ogle, George A., Standard Atlas of Macomb County, Michigan, George A. Ogle Company, Chicago, 1895.

² Anonymous, Guide and Directory, Selfridge Air Force Base, 1960, p. 15.

With the exception of an old farm house acquired when the base expanded during World War II (Building #509), all Selfridge structures were erected between 1927 and 1992, with 55 constructed prior to World War II, 40 built just prior to and during World War II, 154 erected during the Cold War era (1946-1974) and the remaining 79 between 1975 and the present. Major construction episodes occurring between 1925 and 1933 when the base became a permanent facility, from 1941 and 1945 during World War II, and between 1946 and 1970 during the Cold War era. These properties display a range of functions, including aircraft support, recreation, storage, specialized training, power generation, drainage, radar installations and housing. Some are substantial masonry buildings while others are "temporary" wood frame or prefabricated metal buildings still in use 50 years after construction. Most have been substantially altered as use and function evolved over the years.

II. SELFRIDGE AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE-EARLY HISTORY (PRE-1917)

Selfridge Field was originally a grass landing strip developed by Henry B. Joy of the Joy Realty Company, and was used as a test field by the Packard Motor Company.³ Even at this early date the field was at the forefront of aviation:

³Anonymous, History of Selfridge Air Force Base, Michigan, 1967, p. 1.

in January, 1911 Lt. Paul Beck made the Army's first radiotelegraphic transmission from an airplane above the field at an altitude of 100 feet.⁴ No buildings or landscape features survive from this period of occupancy.

III. SELFLEDGE DURING WORLD WAR I (1917-1918)

As hostilities in Europe flared during World War I, Henry Joy proposed that the United States (U.S.) government take over the field for military use. The value of aviation had not yet been demonstrated to the military, so the land and airfield were leased rather than purchased by the War Department. In 1917 construction began to improve the grass Joy Aviation Field, which occupied a tract of 600 acres and was accessible only by dirt farm roads. After the Army occupied the complex and renamed it Selfledge Field, 40 additional acres were acquired under emergency wartime authority along the Clinton River south of the original field.⁵ Roads soon became impassible under the heavy equipment and heavy tractors were used to pull each truck to the construction site even after plank roads were built to try to alleviate muddy arteries.

According to a panoramic photograph on display at the Selfledge Base Museum,

⁴ Nigro, Louis, Selfledge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, 1977, p.2.

⁵ Nellis Newspapers, Pageant of Progress Edition, Selfledge Field," 1927

the original Selfridge Field was designed by the noted Detroit architectural firm of Albert Kahn Associates, and was constructed by the general contracting firm of Walbridge and Aldinger of Livonia. However, none of the original frame buildings or plan survive, having all been obliterated by demolition and upgrading programs as the base expanded and evolved through the years (see Photo 1).

The first military units at Selfridge, the 8th and 9th Aero Squadrons of the U.S. Army Signal Corps, arrived on July 7, 1917.⁶ They assembled a JN-4D "Jenny" biplane and recorded the first military flight from Selfridge the next morning. This flight is the basis of Selfridge's claim to be the oldest continuously operating facility that originated as an air field, although Langley Field, in Virginia and Kelly Field, in Texas, are of similar vintage. Pilots at Selfridge often only had two weeks of training before being shipped off to Europe. During the winter months, before ski-equipped planes were in use, Selfridge facilities were used to train mechanics.

In 1918 the French Aviation Mission and the British Aviation Mission sent representatives, who were assisted by Canadian air officers, to organize a School of Aerial Gunnery at Selfridge, and by the end of World War I the base

⁶ Anonymous, Selfridge Field Air Fighters, 1919, p.6.

possessed eight miles of targets and 66 square miles of water reservation: recognized as one of the premier military facilities of its type in the world.⁷ The school offered Aerial Gunnery School for Observers, who concentrated in aerial spotting and reconnaissance, and another for "Fighting Observers," who received intensive gunnery training. By 1918, 250 students were enrolled in the program and on some occasions over 50 aircraft were airborne over the field simultaneously. Among those trained at Selfridge was Edward "Eddie" Rickenbacker, who led all World War I pilots in aerial victories while leading his famous 97th "Hat in the Ring" Squadron.⁸ In addition to advanced flying and bombing, the base also offered radio and photography training.

No buildings built during this period of base occupancy survive, and the original base plan has been totally altered from the original configuration as roads were constructed, runways relocated and expanded, and structures demolished and constructed as the base evolved to meet the changing needs of its military role.

III. SELFRIDGE BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS (1919-1940)

After the end of the war, the community and state lobbied to keep the base

⁷ Ibid. p. 6

⁸ Ibid. p. 40; Detroit News, "Eras Meet for Selfridge's 50th," July 9, 1967.

open. In the two years between its founding in 1917 and July, 1919 nearly \$2,500,000 had been spent construction at Selfridge. Still, by 1919 the base was classified as a temporary storage depot with only two active pilots and 14 civilian employees.⁹ In 1921 the National Aeronautics Advisory Committee recommended that the 600 acres of Joy Field (and 66 square miles of Lake St. Clair gunnery range) made available by lease from Henry Joy and the Packard Motor Company to the government be purchased as a permanent installation (see Photo 2). The War Department entered into negotiations with Henry Joy, the final acquiring the land at a purchase price of \$190,000 after the government initiated condemnation proceedings to settle the matter.¹⁰

Selfridge was declared a permanent base in 1922, and its role changed from a training facility to a pursuit (fighter) base. The 1st Pursuit Squadron was assigned to Selfridge and flew en masse from Ellington Field, Texas, the first successful completion of such a maneuver.¹¹ Selfridge became the center of fighter aviation in the nation, and in some years the 1st Pursuit Group was the only pursuit group in active military service. In 1924 four pursuit squadrons and the pursuit group headquarters of the 5th Corps area trained at the base.

⁹ Anonymous, History of Selfridge Air Force Base, Michigan, 1967, p. 5.

¹⁰Condemnation verdict, U.S. District Court, June 29, 1921.

¹¹ Detroit News, "From the Flying Jenny to the Jets," June 26, 1967.

In 1925 aircraft from Selfridge flew to Miami, Florida in two days, and another group flew to San Francisco equipped with night-flying equipment and returned within a week, both efforts demonstrating that the feasibility of moving a squadron country-wide in short time periods.¹²

During 1920s pursuit pilots developed and studied group maneuver techniques, and experimented with the technological innovations such as the first jettisonable fuel tanks and airborne radio communications.¹³ Air shows at Selfridge, such as the National Air Races, held annually at Selfridge between 1922 and 1934, and the Mitchell Air Races in the 1930s, led to the establishment of air speed records. These events helped train numerous pilots and aviation pioneers, including Charles A. Lindbergh, who was at Selfridge in 1924.¹⁴ In 1930 the pilots at Selfridge tested automatically regulated oxygen face masks that permitted high altitude flight, and in 1931 Selfridge's 1st Pursuit Group flew to Washington in two hours, proving air defense could be established rapidly for the nation's capital.

By the mid-1920s the tar paper shacks originally erected for World War I use

¹² Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, 1977, p. 8.

¹³ Ibid., p.7.

¹⁴ Anonymous, History of Selfridge Air Force Base, Michigan, 1967, p. 6.

were in decrepit shape. This fact, and concerns about flooding of the low-lying field due to faulty drainage, resulted in attempts to close Selfridge, and, in fact, the Army rescinded the order making Selfridge a permanent field. The air field was saved only after Ford Motor Company engineers designed new drainage systems for the field and supported by intensive lobbying by citizens and government officials.¹⁵ In 1926 Congress approved the initial \$750,000 of a multi-million dollar building program that resulted in construction in the late 1920s and early 1930s of many of the brick buildings still present today in the Cantonment area of the base¹⁶ (see Photo 3). Selfridge remained at the forefront of technological innovation, for example, in June, 1927 the first night flight was completed at the base under light provided by a 5 million candlepower floodlight.¹⁷

Construction at the base continued through the Depression, and runways were paved with the assistance of the Works Progress Administration.¹⁸ After the government took title to lakefront property, the base extended several hundred

¹⁵Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, 1977, p. 7.

¹⁶ Nellis Newspapers, Pageant of Progress Edition, Selfridge Field, Large Sums Spent to Make Field Habitable" 1927.

¹⁷Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, 1977, p. 9.

¹⁸Ibid. p. 8.

feet into Lake St. Clair through a landfill and seawall project that provided protection for the cantonment area.¹⁹ In 1935 Selfridge became part of the top-level General Headquarters (GHQ) for the Army Air Corps along with five other fields dispersed across the United States, including Mitchell Field in New York, Langley Field in Virginia, Barksdale Field in Louisiana, and March and Hamilton Fields in California.

In 1939, as war fever in Europe and Asia led to a strengthening of external defenses, a large military expansion program to train new pursuit groups budgeted \$13.5 million for Selfridge and resulted in the construction of a new 120 by 2000 foot East-West runway to complement the original 60 by 1800 foot North-South runway as well as construction of many "temporary" frame buildings still in use²⁰ (see Photo 4). In 1939 the 17th Pursuit Squadron left Selfridge for southeast Asia to help bolster the defenses of the Philippines. The following year, forty volunteer pilots and mechanics left the base for Rangoon to join General Claire Chennault and the famed "Flying Tigers."

IV. SELFTRIDGE AND WORLD WAR II

¹⁹ Mihalek, Joseph, Evolution of Family Housing, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, p. 40.

²⁰ Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, 1977, p. 10.

During World War II Selfridge Field was expanded from 641 to over 3,660 acres as the War Powers Act was invoked in 1942 to condemn the area west and north of the original field, generally bounded by Jefferson Avenue and Sugarbush Road. Jefferson Avenue, originally the base's western boundary, became the base's central artery. Primary alteration included widening of the original hangar line southward over 1,000 feet to a width of 648 feet between the hangars and the East-West runway completed by M.J. Boyle and Company of Chicago.²¹

The base served as a staging or grouping facility, where pilots and support personnel were brought together and trained together as a flight group for six months and then sent overseas. The group would then be replaced by another set of pilots for training. Of particular note in this regard is Selfridge's role as a training field for the first African American aviators, the Tuskegee Airmen. In addition to American fliers, French cadets were also trained at the base.²² One of the groups trained at Selfridge was the 107th Observation Squadron, the first operational tactical observation squadron in Northern Europe.²³ The

²¹ Selfridge Field News, "Expansion to Make Selfridge Large Air Base," August 13, 1942; Anonymous, History of Selfridge Air Force Base, Michigan, 1967, p. 9.

²² Anonymous, History of Selfridge Air Force Base, Michigan, 1967, p. 9.

²³ Interview, Colonel Robert Stone (ret.), October 13, 1995.

107th Observation Squadron provided aerial photography in preparation for D-day. During World War II, such nationally renowned celebrities as Bing Crosby, Loretta Young, and Joe E. Brown entertained at the base.²⁴

Most buildings built between 1941 and 1945, in contrast to the somewhat earlier structures comprising the Cantonment District, were generally utilitarian in style and often concerned more with function over form. These structures were most often built of wood frame due to expediency required in rapid base expansion, and many were designed to be "temporary" buildings. They range from warehouses to administrative offices to barracks. Of significant import to the field is the construction of the main North-South Runway still in service today in modified form, between April and July of 1943²⁵ (see Photo 7).

The Tuskegee Airmen at Selfridge

During World War II, the 332nd Fighter Group received training at Selfridge. The 99th Pursuit/Fighter Squadron and the 100th, 301st, and 302nd fighter squadrons comprising this group were America's first African-American military

²⁴ Selfridge Field News, base newspaper, issues 6/25/42 through 10/16/43.

²⁵ Annotated photographs on file, Selfridge Base Museum, Historic Photograph File.

pilots.²⁶

National mobilization for World War II created opportunities for minorities in the services after President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, promoting equal service opportunities in the war effort. The Selective Service Office stated racial discrimination would not be acceptable, but a "separate but equal" policy accepting racial segregation generally prevailed. Typical military housing policy continued to assign black soldiers to less desirable sites on posts, removed them from the center of post activities and left them far from exchanges.²⁷

Public Law 18 provided for large scale expansion of the Army Air Corps through contracts with civilian schools and included a section authorizing establishment of a training program in primary flight training for African-Americans. The Civilian Pilot Training Program was successfully initiated in 1939, but the Army Air Corps refused to accept African-Americans until 1941 when a lawsuit forced the War Department to establish an air unit to train African-Americans in cooperation with the Tuskegee Institute.²⁸ Generally, black units were not

²⁶ Riley, Eddie C., "The Tuskegee Airmen." Sergeants, December 1992, p. 20.

²⁷ Department of Defense, Black Americans in Defense of Our Nation, p. 62.

²⁸ Riley, Eddie C., "The Tuskegee Airmen," 1992, p. 20.

established in the military until 1942-1943, and blacks were placed in service units (such as trucking and port outfits) that would free whites for combat. The service maintained a policy that local civil laws would control base life.

Training for Tuskegee Airmen occurred at the isolated, newly activated Tuskegee Army Air Field in Alabama. The program was often called the Tuskegee "experiment" because in 1941 it was the first government program to offer training to African-Americans as military aviators in the Army Air Corps.

Commonly called the "Tuskegee Airmen", the "Lonely Eagles", who eventually numbered 992 pilots, flew P-40s, P-47s, P-39s, P-51s and bombers.²⁹ The first African-American squadron, the 99th Pursuit Squadron, was activated in 1941, and the first class included West Point Graduate Benjamin O. Davis. Because Tuskegee was the only source for African-American pilots it took until 1943 to fully man the 332nd Fighter Group's three, and later, four, squadrons.³⁰

After completing this initial training, the airmen were moved to Selfridge, where

²⁹ Tuskegee Airmen, 15th Annual African-American Career Awareness Fair Souvenir Booklet, Cobo Hall, Detroit.

³⁰Riley, Eddie C., "The Tuskegee Airmen," 1992, p. 21.

they received advanced training before being shipped overseas to Europe and North Africa. Selfridge was one of three northern U.S. bases that trained graduates of the Tuskegee program, but the only one that served as an aerial pursuit training base. Selfridge was considered the best training base for blacks because of its superior facilities and proximity to Detroit, compared to other black training fields that offered few amenities and were isolated with small towns. The other training locations included aircraft maintenance school at Chanute Field, Illinois, armament school at Ft. Lowrey Colorado and communications school at Scott Field Illinois, as well as B-25 and B-26 bomber training at Freeman, Indiana and Godman, Kentucky.³¹ Bomber squadrons included the 616th, 617th, 618th and 619th Bombardment Squadrons, and the 477th Medium Bombardment Group. (The 477th began its training at Selfridge, but later moved to Godman Field, Kentucky.)

The Tuskegee Airmen, as well as the more traditional black manual and service units, experienced segregated facilities at Selfridge. An article in the July 30, 1942 edition of the base newspaper, The Selfridge Field News under the headline "Selfridge Field No. 2 to House Negro Units" stated that a quartermaster detachment and the black 44th Aviation squadron occupied the area at the southwest corner of the airdrome. The unit Headquarters was the

³¹Interview, Alexander Jefferson, Tuskegee Airman, Detroit, November 27, 1995.

only wooden building on site, and the post exchange occupied one tent, while three large tents housed the mess hall and kitchen. The segregated area was "complete with its own headquarters, post exchange, electric system and mail system."

Eventually "temporary" frame buildings were erected, some of which still stand today (see Photos 10 and 11). The July 24, 1943 edition of the base newspaper, noting the one-year anniversary of the 44th Aviation Squadron at Selfridge, stated that during the winter the unit moved from its tent camp at Selfridge #2 to temporary barracks along the bay shore and "spent 8 weeks in the new barracks west of Jefferson Road."

The 96th Service Group, a black unit organized to support Tuskegee pilots, initially trained at Tuskegee Field and moved to Selfridge Field in April, 1943 followed shortly thereafter by the Tuskegee Airmen. With the exception of the Tuskegee Airmen commissioned officers, who occupied segregated quarters in the brick barracks buildings (#301-#304) and ate at a segregated mess hall in Building #301, black units were segregated to the southwest portion of base. Some of the men lived in Mt. Clemens or Detroit and commuted to the base daily. The Airmen were at Selfridge for a relatively short time, usually for the

three months required for group organization and training.³²

IV. SELFRIDGE AND THE COLD WAR (1946-1974): INTRODUCTION

In 1947, Selfridge Field became Selfridge Air Force Base after the Air Force became a separate branch of military service. In July 1948, the 56th Fighter Group, flying 16 F-80s, the military's first jet fighters, flew in a mass deployment from Selfridge to Scotland, the first such west-east transatlantic flight. They continued on to Furstenfeldbruck, Germany to demonstrate that a force of fighters could be put in place rapidly after the Soviets began aggressive passes at the slow-moving cargo aircraft engaged in the Berlin Airlift.³³

In 1950, the 10th Air Force Headquarters moved to Selfridge. The 10th Air Force Headquarters administered Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard Units in 13 states. Its authority had been expanded to 18 states by the time it was deactivated in 1960.³⁴ At this time the 56th Fighter Group provided

³²Interview, Alexander Jefferson, Tuskegee Airman, Detroit, August 16, 1995.

³³Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, 1977, p. 11.

³⁴Anonymous, Brief History of Selfridge Air Force Base, 1917-1960, 1960, p. 11.

six of America's first 15 aces in Korea, earning Selfridge the title "The Home of the MIG Killers". As part of the Air Defense Command, its mission was the defense of the Greater Detroit area. This air defense capability at Selfridge was inactivated in 1969.

During the 1960s Selfridge acquired the title "Home of the Generals" because of the nearly 150 officers who trained or served at the base and rose through the ranks to become General Officers. Some of the more notable generals and other military personnel who have served at Selfridge include:³⁵

Captain Edward V. "Eddie" Rickenbacker, led all pilots in World War I with 27 downed enemy aircraft, commanding officer of the famous 94th "Hat in the Ring" squadron; awarded Air Force Medal of Honor;

Boyd "Buzz" Wagner, 17th Pursuit Squadron, World War II's first American ace;

Lt. General James H. Doolittle, led the first bombing raid on Tokyo in World War II;

³⁵ Bright, Charles B. (ed.), Historical Dictionary of the U.S. Air Force, 1992; Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History.

General Benjamin O. Davis Sr., commanding officer of 332nd and 99th Fighter Groups-"Tuskegee Airmen", first African-American graduate of U.S. Military Academy in twentieth century, first African-American general in U.S. Air Force and primary catalyst in its de-segregation;

General Benjamin O. Davis Jr., Tuskegee Airman;

General Daniel "Chappie" James, Tuskegee, became nation's first African American four-star general and commanded the Air Defense Command;

General Curtis E. LeMay, Commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe who devised and commanded the Berlin Air Lift; commanding officer who developed Strategic Air Command (SAC); Air Force Chief of Staff, Vice Presidential candidate;

General Earle E. Partridge, Commander in Chief of Continental Air Defense Command (CONAD), commander of Far East Air Forces;

General Carl "Tooe" Spaatz, last commanding officer of U.S. Army Air Forces and first Chief of Staff of U.S. Air Force who established many of its procedures; Eisenhower's air commander; supervised nuclear weapons raid on

Hiroshima and Nagasaki; and

General Emmet "Rosie" O'Donnell, Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Forces, led first B-29 raid on Tokyo, in charge of Air Force during Korean conflict.

During the period from the end of World War II until the early 1970s Selfridge was an important node in the United States continental defense network. As home to a NORAD contingent, Air Defense Command units and Nike installations, and a Strategic Air Command facility, the base played a significant role in modern military strategy. Each of these contexts is discussed below on a district by district basis.

Selfridge and the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD)

In December, 1949 the 661st Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron was activated at Selfridge, moving to a location at the north end of the base in 1950.³⁶ Redesignated as the 661st Radar Squadron, Semiautomatic Ground Environment (SAGE) in 1959, it provided long range search, height, and identification radar and ground-to-air radio communications for the 23rd North

³⁶Anonymous, Selfridge Air Force Base, Distinguished Visitors Edition, 1971, p. 10.

American Air Defense Command (NORAD) Division Direction Center at Duluth, Minnesota. Its mission was to provide continuous surveillance of North American land mass using a pioneering air defense system that employed electronic controls. NORAD was created by joint agreement between the U.S. and Canada to create an integrated command for control of the nations' air defense forces to counter the Soviet threat. It was initially structured to control fighters and interceptors, and surface-to-air missiles to defend the continent against bombers. After the Soviets developed intercontinental ballistic missiles, its role was expanded to missile defense.³⁷

The first SAGE Direction Center was operational in 1958 and full deployment in the 22 air defense sectors in the United States and one in Canada was achieved by 1963.³⁸ The 661st, "one of a very few radar units that are not located in isolated areas," was originally equipped with "V BEAM" type radar in 1960, a 174-foot early warning radar antenna in the northeast corner of base, a structure that became a landmark for boaters on Lake St. Clair. The unit was deactivated at Selfridge in 1974 and the large Radar antenna (120 feet by 60 feet) on top of building #1030 was removed and sent to Montauk

³⁷Bright, Charles B. (ed.), Historical Dictionary of the U.S. Air Force, 1992, p. 519.

³⁸ibid. p. 519.

Point, Long Island to replace an identical salt water-damaged unit there.³⁹

The 2nd Region was an integral part of the U.S. Army Air Defense Command (ARADCOM), under the direction of NORAD. When the 2nd Region was established in 1946, it initially controlled fighter wings, but its fighter role was reduced over time as tasks were transferred to the Air National Guard and U.S. Air Force Reserve. ARADCOM remained a vital link in NORAD through its control of surface-to-air Nike missile units. The 2nd Region was one of three ARADCOM regions (1st, 2nd and 6th). The 2nd Region's mission was to provide combat-ready air defense missile units to the Eastern NORAD Region. Its ten state region of the north central U.S. included five metro area defenses: Chicago-Milwaukee, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Pittsburgh, Detroit and Cleveland.⁴⁰

In developing the Nike defense, the U.S. government attempted to position missile complexes on existing Army installations or government land. These preferred locations, such as at Selfridge, provided ready-made security and reduced cost.⁴¹ The Selfridge Nike launchers were part of a national missile

³⁹Interview, Colonel Robert Stone (ret.), August 17, 1995.

⁴⁰Anonymous, Selfridge Air Force Base, Distinguished Visitors Edition, 1971, p. 11.

⁴¹U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Reconnaissance Level Architectural Survey Nike Missile Sites Within the Washington-Baltimore Defense Area, Maryland and Virginia, 1995, p. 6

defense to protect key defense points against hostile bombers, replacing anti-aircraft gun emplacements that were inadequate against jet aircraft. Surface to air missile defense was initiated with the first Nike Ajax missiles in late 1953. During the late 1950s Army units began transferring control of many the earlier Ajax missile installations to National Guard units, but remained in control of the Hercules installations, until 1964 when Guard units began switching to the more advanced Hercules missiles.⁴²

The 28th Artillery Group (Air Defense), a unit of the ADC under the control of NORAD, set up its headquarters at Selfridge in the southwest portion of the base in 1952.⁴³ Initially in charge of administering the 90 millimeter gun emplacements for protecting cities such as Detroit, it was later assigned the responsibility of providing combat-ready air defense missile units for defense of the Detroit-Cleveland area and administered Nike missile battalions at Selfridge and others ringing Detroit and Cleveland. In addition to missiles at Selfridge, the Detroit area firing batteries were located at Utica (Battery A), Carleton (Battery C) and Union Lake (Battery D) while Cleveland sites were

⁴²ibid., p. 5.

⁴³Anonymous, History of Selfridge Air Force Base, Michigan, 1967, 11.

located near Painesville, Bratenahl, and Fairview Park.⁴⁴ These batteries initially used Nike Ajax missiles but later adopted the more advanced Nike Hercules missiles.

At Selfridge Nike Ajax missiles were installed at a Headquarters 28th Group battery (Battery D-15, 3rd Battalion, 517th Artillery) in 1955 and remained on line until replaced by advanced Hercules missiles, which were larger, more powerful and had a longer range, in 1959.⁴⁵ A second Hercules battery, Battery D-16 (A Battery, 3rd Battalion, 517th Artillery), was activated with advanced High Power Acquisition Radar (HIPAR) radar at Selfridge in 1962.⁴⁶ The Nike launchers at Selfridge were deactivated by 1972, and by 1974 the last surface to air missile batteries were phased out by the Army as a condition of the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty signed by the United States and Russia in 1972.⁴⁷ After 1969 the remaining 28th Artillery Group administrative personnel were moved from the original location in the southwest corner of base to an area adjacent to 661st Radar Squadron. The 28th Artillery Group

⁴⁴Anonymous, Selfridge Air Force Base, Distinguished Visitors Edition, 1971, p. 11.

⁴⁵U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, "Locations of Former Nike Missile Defense Sites," no date, p. B-20.

⁴⁶ibid. p. B-21.

⁴⁷Callahan, William, "Cold War Relics," Historic Illinois, 15(4) (1992), p. 4.

was deactivated 1974.⁴⁸

The buildings erected for these Cold War units, both mission-related and residential, are starkly functional. Except for the most specialized structures such as radar installations, all are low flat roofed structures built of masonry with minimal architectural embellishment. All were designed to promote efficiency and were arranged in tight complexes whose proximity maximized security concerns. The monolithic radar towers steel and reinforced concrete (Buildings #1030 and #1031) rise abruptly several stories above the surrounding level terrain and served as landmarks for boaters in Lake St. Clair⁴⁹ (see Photos 5 and 8).

Selfridge and the Strategic Air Command (SAC)

In 1959, SAC erected hangars and support facilities in the northwest part of Selfridge to support a Refueling Wing of KC-97 tankers. Reflecting the growth of the base during this period, in 1959 the main North-South runway was extended to handle the larger aircraft stationed at Selfridge, especially those

⁴⁸Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, 1977, p. 19.

⁴⁹Interview, Colonel Robert Stone (ret.), August 16, 1995.

associated with the Strategic Air Command.⁵⁰ In 1960, the 4045th Air Refueling Wing (SAC) arrived at the base to occupy the new facilities.⁵¹ During the Cold War, the 4045th and 500th Air Refueling Wings had the mission of constant readiness to respond to an alert and refuel SAC bombers in flight until the SAC unit was deactivated in 1966.⁵²

V. SELFTRIDGE IN RECENT YEARS

In 1966 the U.S. Coast Guard Air Station, Detroit, moved to Selfridge.⁵³ In 1967 base personnel were employed in support of C-130 transport planes that brought thousands of paratroopers to Selfridge to support police and National Guard troops during the Detroit civil disturbances. In 1967, at Selfridge's 50th anniversary celebration, the number of base military personnel numbered about 4,000, with dependents boosting the total base population to about 10,000.⁵⁴

⁵⁰Interview, Colonel Robert Stone (ret.) August 18, 1995; see also photographs on file, Selfridge Base Museum, Historic Photograph File.

⁵¹Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, 1977, p. 14.

⁵²Interview, Colonel Robert Stone (ret.), August 16, 1995.

⁵³Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, 1977, p. 15.

⁵⁴Detroit News, "Eras Meet for Selfridge's 50th," July 9, 1967.

In 1969 the Marine Air Reserve Training Detachment arrived at the base, and in 1970 the Naval Air Reserve moved from Grosse Ile to the base, and the Michigan National Guard, which had operated at Detroit Metropolitan Airport for 40 years, also moved to Selfridge.⁵⁵ In 1971 Selfridge was transferred from the U.S. Air Force to the Michigan Air National Guard, but legally remains federal property leased to the State of Michigan. The base name officially changed from Selfridge Air Force Base to Selfridge Air National Guard Base.⁵⁶

As a Reserve Forces installation, Selfridge's mission was defined as support of National Guard and Reserve training. The 127th Tactical Fighter Group remained at Selfridge, received jets from Wurtsmith Air Force Base Michigan when that base was deactivated in 1973, and continued training missions at Selfridge. In 1974 the 28th Artillery Group and 661st Radar Squadron were deactivated, and oversight of the base support mission of operating base housing and special services was transferred from the U.S. Army support Detachment to the U.S. Army Tank-Automotive Command (TACOM).⁵⁷

⁵⁵Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, 1977, p. 17.

⁵⁶Anonymous, Selfridge Air Force Base, Distinguished Visitors Edition, 1971, p. 14.

⁵⁷Mihalak, Joseph, Evolution of Family Housing, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Mount Clemens, Michigan, 1988, p. 6.

In 1976 Selfridge actively assisted the region in celebrating the United States Bicentennial in parades, flyovers, exhibits and ceremonies. At this time the Navy added Patrol Squadron (VP) 93, flying the P-3 "Orion" patrol bomber and Fleet Logistics Squadron 62 (VR-62) flying the C-9B Skytrain, while the 305th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron received the H-3 ("Jolly Green Giant") aircraft that permitted it to expand its mission to all phases of rescue, from initial search to final pickup. In 1978 the unit was redesignated as the 305th Rescue and Weather Reconnaissance Wing.⁵⁸ Although the U.S. Marines ceased flying operations at Selfridge upon deactivation of a Marine Air Reserve Training Detachment in 1977, they maintained a presence at the base through the operation of Marine Wing Support Group 47.

During the 1980s units at Selfridge received upgrades in aircraft: the 927th replaced the C-130A Hercules with the C-130E, and the 191st converted to the F-4D Phantom. Organizational and management changes included the 1987 discontinuation of Detachment 1, Headquarters Michigan Air National Guard, with its functions incorporated into the reorganized Headquarters, 127th Tactical Fighter Wing, and the transfer of 480 acres at Selfridge that included

⁵⁸ Anonymous, Air Show 1994, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Michigan, June 11-12, 1994, p.22.

portions of the cantonment area from the U.S. Air Force to the U.S. Army.⁵⁹

In the early 1990s the 127th Fighter Wing (ANG) served as the host organization at Selfridge with tenant units including the 191st Airlift Group (ANG), the 927th Air Refueling Group (Air Force Reserve), Coast Guard Air Station Detroit, Naval Reserve Readiness Center Detroit, Marine Corps Wing Support Group 47, the U.S. Army Tank Automotive Command Support Activity Selfridge, Army Readiness Group Selfridge and Army Reserve Company A 3-158 Aviation Regiment.⁶⁰ The Coast Guard Air Station Detroit continued to be an integral part of the Search and Rescue efforts in the region and also provides reconnaissance flights to support ice breaking operations and marine environmental response and enforcement.

The Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1993 (BRAC) affected units based at Selfridge. The Naval Air Reserve Facility Detroit and its flight operations were disestablished in 1994 at Selfridge, but the Naval Reserve Readiness Center was moved to the base to provide training and support for area reserve

⁵⁹Mihalak, Joseph, Evolution of Family Housing, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Mount Clemens, Michigan, 1988, p. 6.

⁶⁰Anonymous, Air Show 1994, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Michigan, June 11-12, 1994, p. 5.

units.⁶¹ Selfridge's contribution to national defense polices changed from air defense to an emphasis upon logistical support. In 1992-1993 the 927th Airlift Group converted into the 927th Air Refueling Group, Air Force Reserve, with a new mission of aerial refueling, changing from C-130 Hercules aircraft to KC-135E tankers.⁶² In 1994 the 191st Fighter Squadron was transformed into the 191st Airlift Squadron, changing from the F-16 fighter to the C-130 Hercules.⁶³ In 1995 the Defense Department recommended to the BRAC commission that the Army garrison at Selfridge be shut down and personnel dispersed because sufficient commercial housing was available in the area. This proposal was considered but not approved by the commission.

Units at Selfridge in recent years have served the country in a number of capacities, such as support units provided by the 127th and 191st to serve in Operation Desert Storm in Iraq in 1991 and the 191st group assisting in drug intervention patrols out of Howard Air Force Base Panama during the early 1990s, and contributions to the peace effort in Bosnia through preparation of supplies and equipment airlifted to southern Europe.⁶⁴ In 1996 the 127th

⁶¹ibid. p. 18.

⁶²ibid. p. 23, 45.

⁶³ibid. p. 24, 45.

⁶⁴MIANG, Fact Sheet, U.S. Air Force, 127th Wing, October, 1996.

Wing was formed by combining the former 127th Fighter Wing and 191st Airlift Group.

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LAKE ST. CLAIR

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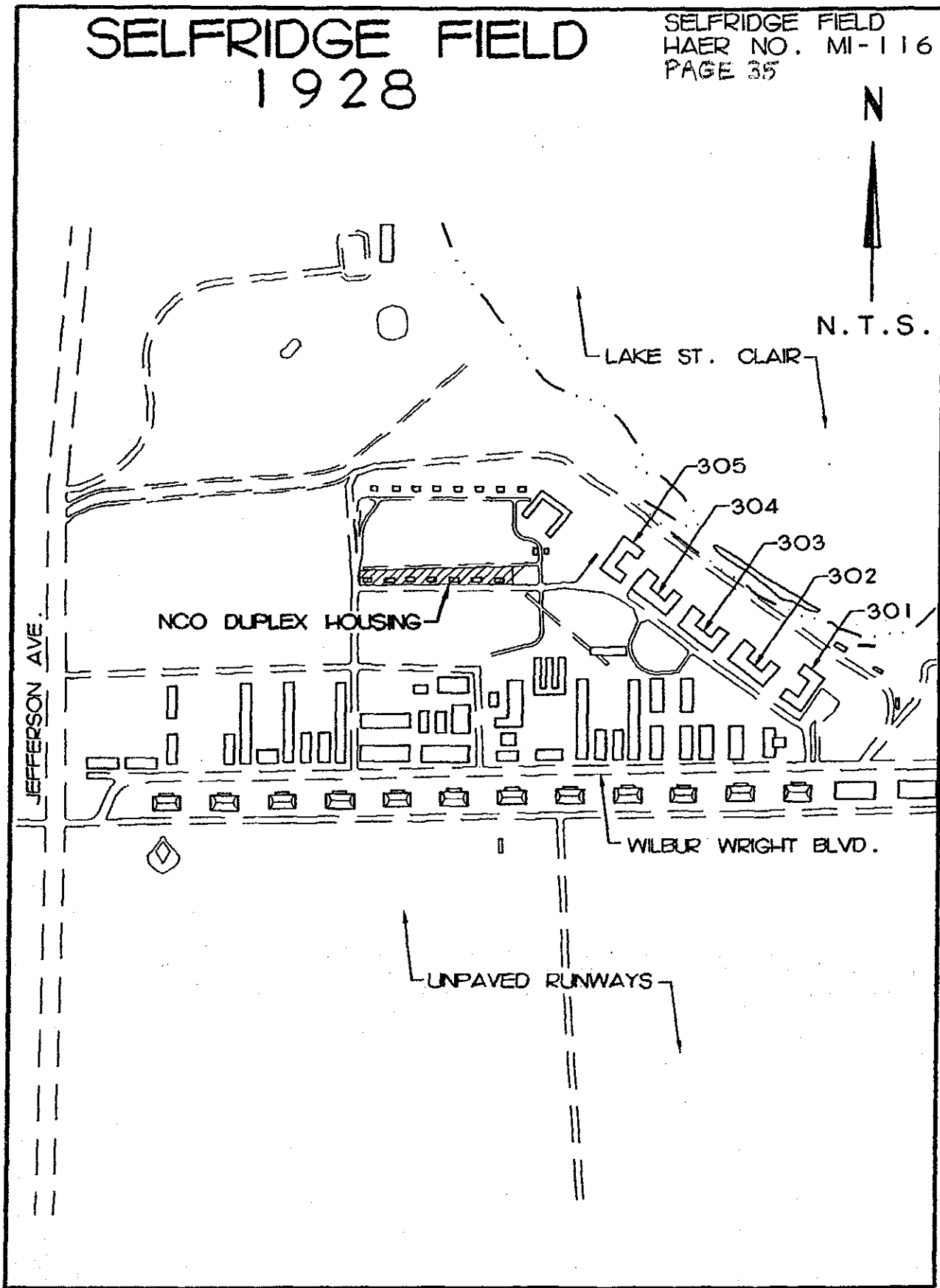
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NCO DUPLEX HOUSING

JEFFERSON AVE.

WILBUR WRIGHT BLVD.

UNPAVED RUNWAYS



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